

Victory to the Postal Workers !

Keep the Royal Mail public !



For a long time now the Labour government has been overseeing a campaign to undermine the public postal service in Britain. 60,000 jobs have gone in recent years, along with 3,500 post offices. Under the guise of a 'modernisation' agreement signed off with the Communication Workers Union (CWU) in 2007, management has indulged in a campaign of petty intimidation of the remaining staff. Whilst adopting an aloof pose, earnestly enjoining management and unions to settle their differences over how to 'modernise', the government is clearly committed to the break-up and privatisation of Royal Mail (RM). The cat was already out of the bag long before Business Secretary Mandelson tore up Labour's phony 'no privatisation' pledges back in the spring.

Mandelson's intervention promised a bill to authorise the infusion of private capital in line with the free market drum being beaten in the Hooper Report. This apparent plea for subsidy from private enterprise in reality is an offer of subsidy from the public purse to the privateers. Whilst predatory entrepreneurs can look forward to cherry picking the profitable areas of RM's current operations, they will of course remain exempt from the unprofitable 'last mile' obligation shouldered by RM – ie, the expensive obligation to deliver mail on a universal basis, as a matter of public service.

The CWU's popular campaign against privatisation, drawing in its wake some Labour backbench 'rebels' fearful of losing their seats over the issue, persuaded the government to hang fire for the moment. That the reprieve is only temporary has been made abundantly clear by the intensifying campaign of bullying and harassment launched by Crozier and co against Royal Mail employees. The provocations include the imposition of a wage freeze, dictation of new roster patterns and automation without negotiation, the conversion of full-time to part-time jobs, the refusal to draft in cover for leave and sick absence and a host of other petty tyrannies calculated to produce, not an efficient service, but a demoralised workforce. That demoralisation is aggravated by the repetition *ad nauseam* that the hole in the RM pension fund can only be plugged by involving private capital. At the same time, the public service offered, for a long time favourable in comparison with the rest of Europe, has suffered deterioration, with the cancellation of second deliveries and Sunday collections, the late arrival of the remaining first delivery, and stamp prices in excess of inflation – all accompanied by an orchestrated campaign of badmouthing of the service strongly reminiscent of the knocking copy which sought to prepare public opinion for the break up and sale of British Rail.

Faced with all this, postal workers had already spent much of 2009 coming out in a series of rolling regional strikes. Arguably, this pin-prick approach kept up a steady pressure on Royal Mail management, and cumulatively produced some spectacular mail backlogs. But such a war of attrition also runs the risk of losing the impact and momentum of an all-out indefinite strike. More crucially, the CWU's failure at its conference to break the link with Labour, despite intense pressure to do so from activists sickened at Labour treachery over privatisation, still keeps the anti-privatisation campaign hemmed in behind the perspective of 'putting pressure on Labour to do the right thing'. Lowering the political horizon in this way risks confusing workers as to the real character of the capitalist crisis they are facing. The struggle to resist the efforts of the capitalist state to make workers pay for the crisis of capitalism will be much strengthened when Labour opportunism is rooted out of the labour movement.

Even now, with the enfeebling influence of the Labour party still widespread, the postal workers have demonstrated the combative spirit of the working class. Once the opportunity arose to ballot for full-scale industrial action, 76 percent of those who voted jumped at the chance. The ensuing national strikes have won solid support, raising the struggle another notch. We can assume that Brendan Barber and Gordon Brown are putting maximum pressure on the CWU to curb its militancy. Yet despite this, and despite Royal Mail renting a 30,000 strong scab army from Manpower and elsewhere to run a shadow operation in places like Dartford and Severn Beach, postal workers remain determined in their struggle for justice, assisted by support groups mushrooming around the country. We call on all workers to support them in this struggle, and urge the CWU to make haste in unchaining itself from the corpse of the Labour party.

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